NC General Statutes: Chapter 87, Article 7
North Carolina Well Construction Act

§ 87-83. Short title.

This Article shall be known and may be cited as the North Carolina Well Construction Act. (1967, c. 1157, s. 1.)

§ 87-84. Findings and policy.

The General Assembly of North Carolina finds that improperly constructed, operated, maintained, or abandoned wells can adversely affect the public health and the groundwater resources of the State. Consistent with the duty to safeguard the public welfare, safety, health and to protect and beneficially develop the groundwater resources of this State, it is declared to be the policy of this State to require that the location, construction, repair, and abandonment of wells, and the installation of pumps and pumping equipment conform to such reasonable requirements as may be necessary to protect the public welfare, safety, health and groundwater resources. (1967, c. 1157, s. 2.)

§ 87-85. Definitions.

As used in this Article, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "Abandoned well" means a well whose use has been discontinued, or which is in such a state of disrepair that continued use for obtaining groundwater or other useful purpose is impracticable.

(2) "Aquifer" means a geologic formation, group of such formations, or a part of such a formation that is water bearing.

(3) "Artesian well" means a well tapping a confined or artesian aquifer.

(4) "Environmental Management Commission" means the North Carolina Environmental Management Commission or its successor, unless otherwise indicated.

(5) "Construction of wells" means all acts necessary to construct wells for any intended purpose or use, including the location and excavation of the well; placement of casings, screens and fittings; development and testing.

(5a) "Department" means the Department of Environment and Natural Resources unless otherwise indicated.

(6) "Installation of pumps and pumping equipment" means the procedure employed in the placement and preparation for operation of pumps and pumping equipment, including all construction involved in making entrances to the well and establishing seals.

(7) "Municipality" means a city, town, county, district, or other public body created by or pursuant to State law, or any combination thereof acting cooperatively or jointly.

(8) "Nonpotable mineralized water" means brackish, saline, or other water containing minerals of such quantity or type as to render the water unsafe, harmful or generally unsuitable for human consumption and general use.

(9) "Person" shall mean any and all persons, including individuals, firms, partnerships, associations, public or private institutions, municipalities or political subdivisions, governmental agencies, or private or public corporations organized or existing under the laws of this State or any other state or country.

(10) "Polluted water" means water containing organic or other contaminants of such type and quantity as to render it unsafe, harmful or unsuitable for human consumption and general use.

(10a) "Private drinking water well" means any excavation that is cored, bored, drilled, jetted, dug, or otherwise constructed to obtain groundwater for human consumption and that serves or is proposed to serve 14 or fewer service connections or that serves or is proposed to serve 24 or fewer individuals. The term "private drinking water well" includes a well that supplies drinking water to a transient noncommunity water system as defined in 40 Code of Federal Regulations § 141.2 (July 1, 2003 Edition).

(11) "Pumps" and "pumping equipment" means any equipment or materials utilized or intended for use in withdrawing or obtaining groundwater including well seals.

(12) "Repair" means work involved in deepening, reaming, sealing, installing or changing casing depths, perforating, screening, or cleaning, acidizing or redevelopment of a well excavation, or any other work which results in breaking or opening the well seal.

(13) "Water supply well" means any well intended or usable as a source of water supply, but not to include a well constructed by an individual on land which is owned or leased by him, appurtenant to a single-family dwelling, and intended for domestic use (including household purposes, farm livestock, or gardens).

(14) "Well" means any excavation that is cored, bored, drilled, jetted, dug or otherwise constructed for the purpose of locating, testing or withdrawing groundwater or for evaluating, testing, developing, draining or recharging any groundwater reservoirs or aquifer, or that may control, divert, or otherwise cause the movement of water from or into any aquifer.

(15) "Well driller," "driller" or "water well contractor" means any person, firm, or corporation engaged in the business of constructing wells.

(16) "Well seal" means an approved arrangement or device used to cap a well or to establish and maintain a junction between the casing or curbing of a well and the piping or equipment installed therein, the purpose or function of which is to prevent pollutants from entering the well at the upper terminal.

(17) "Operation of wells" means the process, frequency, and duration of withdrawing water or other fluids from a well by any means. (1967, c. 1157, s. 3; 1973, c. 1262, s. 23; 1977, c. 771, s. 4; 1987, c. 496, s. 1;

1989, c. 727, s. 218(21); 1997-358, s. 4; 1997-443, s. 11A.119(a); 2006-202, s. 1.)

§ 87-86. Scope.

No person shall construct, operate, repair, or abandon, or cause to be constructed, operated, repaired, or abandoned, any well, nor shall any person install, repair, or cause to be installed or repaired, any pump or pumping equipment contrary to the provisions of this Article and applicable rules and regulations, provided that this Article shall not apply to any distribution of water beyond the point of discharge from the pump. (1967, c. 1157, s. 4; 1987, c. 496, ss. 2, 3.)

§ 87-87. Authority to adopt rules, regulations, and procedures.

The Environmental Management Commission shall adopt rules governing the location, construction, repair, and abandonment of wells, the operation of water wells or well systems with a designed capacity of 100,000 gallons per day or greater, and the installation and repair of pumps and pumping equipment. The Environmental Management Commission shall be responsible for the administration of this Article and shall:

(1) Hold public hearings, upon not less than 30 days' prior notice setting forth the date, place, and time of hearing, and the proposed rules and regulations to be considered at said public hearing, which notice shall be published in one or more newspapers having general circulation throughout the State, in connection with proposed rules and regulations and amendments thereto.

(2) Enforce the provisions of this Article, and any rules and regulations not inconsistent with the provisions of this Article adopted pursuant thereto.

(3) Establish procedures and forms for the submission, review, approval, and rejection of applications, notifications, and reports required under this Article.

(4) Issue such additional regulations as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Article.

(5) Neither adopt nor enforce any rule or regulation that concerns the civil liability of an owner to a well driller for any costs or expenses of drilling and installing a well for the owner.

(6) Adopt rules governing the permitting and inspection by the Commission of private drinking water wells with a designed capacity of 100,000 gallons per day or greater.

(7) Adopt rules governing the permitting and inspection by local health departments of private drinking water wells pursuant to G.S. 87-97. (1967, c. 1157, s. 5; 1973, c. 1262, s. 23; 1985, c. 728, s. 4; 1987, c. 496, s. 4; 2006-202, s. 2.)

§ 87-88. General standards and requirements.

(a) Prior Permission. – Prior permission shall be obtained from the Environmental Management Commission for the construction of (i) any water well or of well systems

with a designed capacity of 100,000 gallons per day or greater; and (ii) of any well in a geographical area where the Environmental Management Commission finds, after public hearings, such permission to be reasonably necessary to protect the groundwater resources and the public welfare, safety and health, taking into consideration other applicable State laws; provided, however, that the Environmental Management Commission shall not reject any application under this subsection for permission to construct a well except upon the ground that the well would not be in compliance with a provision of this Article or with a rule or regulation of the Environmental Management Commission adopted pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 87-87 of this Article. Notification of approval or rejection of an application for permission to construct a well shall be given the applicant within a period of 15 days after receipt of such application. Private drinking water wells (i) with a designed capacity of 100,000 gallons per day or greater or (ii) that are to be constructed in a geographical area where the Environmental Management Commission has found that prior permission is necessary shall be subject to permitting and inspection by the Environmental Management Commission and shall not be subject to permitting and inspection by a local health department. All other private drinking water wells shall be subject to permitting and inspection by the local health department as provided in G.S. 87-97.

(b) Reports. – Any person completing or abandoning any well shall furnish the Environmental Management Commission a certified record of the construction or abandonment of such well within a period of 30 days after completion of construction or abandonment.

(c) Prevention of Contamination. – Every well shall be constructed and maintained in a condition whereby it is not a source or channel of contamination of the groundwater supply or any aquifer. Wells subject to the provisions of subdivision (a)(i) of this section shall be operated in such a way that they shall not cause the violation of applicable groundwater quality standards. Contamination as used herein shall mean the act of introducing into water foreign materials of such a nature, quality, and quantity as to cause degradation of the quality of the water.

(d) Valves and Casing on Flowing Artesian Wells. – Valves and casing on all flowing artesian wells shall be maintained in a condition so that the flow of water can be completely stopped when the well is not being put to a beneficial use. Valves shall be closed when a beneficial use is not being made.

(e) Access Port. – Every water-supply well and such other wells, as may be specified by the Environmental Management Commission, shall be equipped with a usable access port or air line and to be a minimum of 0.5 inch inside diameter opening so that the position of the water level can be determined at any time. Such port shall be installed and maintained in such manner as to prevent entrance of water or foreign material.

(f) Mineralized Water. – Whenever a water-bearing stratum or aquifer that contains nonpotable mineralized water is encountered in well construction, the stratum shall be adequately cased or cemented off as conditions may require so that contamination of the overlying or underlying groundwater zones will not occur.

(g) Polluted Water. – In constructing any well, all water-bearing zones that are known to contain polluted water shall be adequately cased or cemented off so that pollution of the overlying and underlying groundwater zones will not occur.

(h) Well Test. – Every water-supply well shall be tested for capacity by a method and for a period of time acceptable to the Department and depending on the intended use of the well.

(i) Chlorination of the Well. – Upon completion of the well construction and pump installation, all water-supply wells installed for the purpose of obtaining groundwater for human consumption shall be sterilized in accordance with standards for sterilization of drinking water wells established by the U.S. Public Health Service.

(j) Use of Well for Recharge or Disposal. – No well shall be used for recharge, injection or disposal purposes without prior permission from the Environmental Management Commission.

(k) Abandonment of Wells. –

(1) Temporary Abandonment: When any well is temporarily removed from service, the top of the well shall be sealed with a water-tight cap or seal.

(2) Permanent Abandonment: Any well that is to be permanently abandoned shall be filled, plugged, or sealed in such a manner as to prevent the well from being a channel allowing the vertical movement of water and a source of contamination of the groundwater supply.

(3) Abandonment of Water Supply Wells for Other Use: Any water supply well that is removed from service as a potable water supply source may be used for other purposes, including, but not limited to, irrigation, commercial use, or industrial use, and such well is not subject to either subdivision (1) or (2) of this subsection during its use for other purposes. (1967, c. 1157, s. 6; 1973, c. 476, s. 128; c. 1262, s. 23; 1987, c. 496, s. 4; 1989, c. 727, s. 14; 1998-212, s. 14.9B(a); 2006-202, s. 3; 2006-259, s. 50(a).)

§ 87-89. Existing installations.

No well or pump installation in existence and in use on July 6, 1967, shall be required to conform to provisions of subsection (a) of G.S. 87-88, or any rules or regulations adopted pursuant thereto not inconsistent with the provisions of this Article; provided, however, that any well now or hereafter abandoned, including any well deemed to have been abandoned, as defined in the Article, shall, within such time as may be specified by the Environmental Management Commission, be brought into compliance with the requirements of this Article and any applicable rules or regulations with respect to abandonment of wells. It is the intention of the General Assembly that if the provisions of this section are held invalid as a grant of an exclusive or separate emolument or privilege, within the meaning of Article I, Sec. 7 of the North Carolina Constitution, the remainder of this Article shall be given effect without the invalid provision or provisions. (1967, c. 1157, s. 7; 1973, c. 1262, s. 23.)

§ 87-90. Rights of investigation, entry, access and inspection.

The Environmental Management Commission or Department shall have the right to conduct such investigations as it may reasonably find necessary to carry on its duties prescribed in this Article, and for this purpose to enter at reasonable times upon any property, public or private, for the purpose of investigating the condition, installation, or operation of any well or associated equipment, facility, or property, and to require written statements or the filing of reports under oath, with respect to pertinent questions relating to the installation or operation of any well: Provided, that no person shall be required to disclose any secret formula, processes or methods used in any manufacturing operation or any confidential information concerning business activities carried on by him or under his supervision. No person shall refuse entry or access to any authorized representative of the Environmental Management Commission who requests entry for purposes of inspection, and who presents appropriate credentials, nor shall any person obstruct, hamper or interfere with any such representative while in the process of carrying out his official duties, consistent with the provisions of this Article. (1967, c. 1157, s. 8; 1973, c. 1262, s. 23.)

§ 87-91. Notice of violation; remedial action order.

(a) Whenever the Environmental Management Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that there has been a violation of this Article or any rule adopted pursuant to this Article, the Environmental Management Commission or Department shall give written notice to the person or persons alleged to be in violation. The notice shall identify the provision of this Article or rule adopted pursuant to this Article alleged to be violated and the facts alleged to constitute the violation. The Environmental Management Commission may also issue an order requiring specific remedial action. An order requiring remedial action shall specify the action to be taken, the date by which the action must be completed, the possible consequences of failing to comply with the order, and the procedure by which the alleged violator may seek review of the order.

(b) The notice may be served by any means authorized under G.S. 1A-1, Rule 4. (1967, c. 1157, s. 9; 1973, c. 1262, s. 23; 1977, c. 771, s. 4; 1989, c. 727, s. 15; 1997-358, s. 7; 1997-443, s. 11A.119(a).)

§ 87-92. Hearings; appeals.

Any person wishing to contest a penalty, permit decision, or other order issued under this Article shall be entitled to an administrative hearing and judicial review conducted according to the procedures established in Chapter 150B of the General Statutes. (1967, c. 1157, s. 10; 1973, c. 1262, s. 23; 1977, c. 771, s. 4; 1985, c. 728, s. 1; 1987, c. 827, ss. 1, 70.)

§ 87-93: Repealed by Session Laws 1985, c. 728, s. 2.

§ 87-94. Civil penalties.

(a) Any person who violates any provision of this Article, Article 7A of this Chapter, any order issued pursuant thereto, or any rule adopted thereunder, shall be subject to a civil penalty of not more than one thousand dollars ($1,000) for each violation, as determined by the Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources. Each

day of a continuing violation shall be considered a separate offense. No person shall be subject to a penalty who did not directly commit the violation or cause it to be committed.

(b) Repealed by Session Laws 1997-358, s. 3.

(c) In determining the amount of the penalty the Secretary shall consider factors set out in G.S. 143B-282.1(b). The procedures set out in G.S. 143-215.6A and G.S. 143B-282.1 shall apply to civil penalties assessed under this section.

(d) The Secretary shall notify any person assessed a civil penalty of the assessment and the specific reasons therefor by registered or certified mail, or by any means authorized by G.S. 1A-1, Rule 4.

(e) Repealed by Session Laws 1997-358, s. 3.

(f) Repealed by 1995 (Reg. Sess., 1996), c. 743, s. 2.

(g) The clear proceeds of civil penalties provided for in this section shall be remitted to the Civil Penalty and Forfeiture Fund in accordance with G.S. 115C-457.2. (1967, c. 1157, s. 12; 1985, c. 728, s. 3; 1987, c. 246, s. 2; 1989, c. 727, s. 218(22); 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1036, s. 10; 1995 (Reg. Sess., 1996), c. 743, s. 2; 1997-358, s. 3; 1997-443, s. 11A.119(a); 1998-215, s. 44; 2001-440, s. 1.4.)

§ 87-95. Injunctive relief.

Upon violation of any of the provisions of or any order issued pursuant to this Article, or duly adopted rule of the Commission implementing the provisions of this Article, the Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources may, either before or after the institution of proceedings for the collection of the penalty imposed by this Article for such violations, request the Attorney General to institute a civil action in the superior court in the name of the State upon the relation of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources for injunctive relief to restrain the violation or require corrective action, and for such other or further relief in the premises as said court shall deem proper. Neither the institution of the action nor any of the proceedings thereon shall relieve any party to such proceedings from the penalty prescribed by this Article for any violation of same. (1967, c. 1157, s. 13; 1973, c. 1262, s. 23; 1975, c. 842, s. 1; 1977, c. 771, s. 4; 1989, c. 727, s. 16; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1004, s. 19(b); 1997-443, s. 11A.119(a).)

§ 87-96. Conflict with other laws.

(a) The provisions of any law, rule, or local ordinance which establish standards affording greater protection to groundwater resources or public health, safety, or welfare shall prevail, within the jurisdiction to which they apply, over the provisions of this Article and rules adopted pursuant to this Article.

(b) Rules relating to public health, wells, or groundwater adopted by the Commission for Health Services shall prevail over this Article, rules adopted pursuant to this Article, and rules adopted by a local board of health pursuant to subsection (c) of this section. This Article shall not be construed to repeal any law or rule in effect as of July 1, 1989.

(c) A local board of health may adopt by reference rules adopted by the Environmental Management Commission pursuant to this Article, and may adopt more

stringent rules when necessary to protect the public health. (1967, c. 1157, s. 14; 1973, c. 476, s. 128; 1989, c. 727, s. 17; 1991, c. 650, s. 1.)

§ 87-97. (See Editor's note for effective date) Permitting, inspection, and testing of private drinking water wells.

(a) Mandatory Local Well Programs. – Each county, through the local health department that serves the county, shall implement a private drinking water well permitting, inspection, and testing program. Local health departments shall administer the program and enforce the minimum well construction, permitting, inspection, repair, and testing requirements set out in this Article and rules adopted pursuant to this Article.

(b) Permit Required. – Except for those wells required to be permitted by the Environmental Management Commission pursuant to G.S. 87-88, no person shall:

(1) Construct or assist in the construction of a private drinking water well unless a construction permit has been obtained from the local health department.

(2) Repair or assist in the repair of a private drinking water well unless a repair permit has been obtained from the local health department, except that a permit shall not be required for the repair or replacement of a pump or tank.

(c) Permit Not Required for Maintenance or Pump Repair or Replacement. – A repair permit shall not be required for any private drinking water well maintenance work that does not involve breaking or opening the well seal. A repair permit shall not be required for any private drinking water well repair work that involves only the repair or replacement of a pump or tank.

(d) Well Site Evaluation. – The local health department shall conduct a field investigation to evaluate the site on which a private drinking water well is proposed to be located before issuing a permit pursuant to this section. The field investigation shall determine whether there is any abandoned well located on the site, and if so, the construction permit shall be conditioned upon the proper closure of all abandoned wells located on the site in accordance with the requirements of this Article and rules adopted pursuant to this Article. If a private drinking water well is proposed to be located on a site on which a wastewater system subject to the requirements of Article 11 of Chapter 130A of the General Statutes is located or proposed to be located, the application for a construction permit shall be accompanied by a plat, as defined in G.S. 130A-334.

(e) Issuance of Permit. – The local health department shall issue a construction permit or repair permit if it determines that a private drinking water well can be constructed or repaired and operated in compliance with this Article and rules adopted pursuant to this Article. The local health department may impose any conditions on the issuance of a construction permit or repair permit that it determines to be necessary to ensure compliance with this Article and rules adopted pursuant to this Article.

(f) Expiration and Revocation. – A construction permit or repair permit shall be valid for a period of five years except that the local health department may revoke a permit at any time if it determines that there has been a material change in any fact or circumstance upon which the permit is issued. The foregoing shall be prominently stated on the face of the permit. The validity of a construction permit or a repair permit shall not

be affected by a change in ownership of the site on which a private drinking water well is proposed to be located or is located if the location of the well is unchanged and the well and the facility served by the well remain under common ownership.

(f1) Chlorination of the Well. – Upon completion of construction of a private drinking water well, the well shall be sterilized in accordance with the standards of drinking water wells established by the United States Public Health Service.

(g) Certificate of Completion. – Upon completion of construction of a private drinking water well or repair of a private drinking water well for which a permit is required under this section, the local health department shall inspect the well to determine whether it was constructed or repaired in compliance with the construction permit or repair permit. If the local health department determines that the private drinking water well has been constructed or repaired in accordance with the requirements of the construction permit or repair permit, the construction and repair requirements of this Article, and rules adopted pursuant to this Article, the local health department shall issue a certificate of completion. No person shall place a private drinking water well into service without first having obtained a certificate of completion. No person shall return a private drinking water well that has undergone repair to service without first having obtained a certificate of completion.

(h) Drinking Water Testing. – Within 30 days after it issues a certificate of completion for a newly constructed private drinking water well, the local health department shall test the water obtained from the well or ensure that the water obtained from the well has been sampled and tested by a certified laboratory in accordance with rules adopted by the Commission for Health Services. The water shall be tested for the following parameters: arsenic, barium, cadmium, chromium, copper, fluoride, lead, iron, magnesium, manganese, mercury, nitrates, nitrites, selenium, silver, sodium, zinc, pH, and bacterial indicators.

(i) Commission for Health Services to Adopt Drinking Water Testing Rules. – The Commission for Health Services shall adopt rules governing the sampling and testing of well water and the reporting of test results. The rules shall allow local health departments to designate third parties to collect and test samples and report test results. The rules shall also provide for corrective action and retesting where appropriate. The Commission for Health Services may by rule require testing for additional parameters if the Commission makes a specific finding that testing for the additional parameters is necessary to protect public health.

(j) Test Results. – The local health department shall provide test results to the owner of the newly constructed private drinking water well and, to the extent practicable, to any leaseholder of a dwelling unit or other facility served by the well at the time the water is sampled.

(k) Registry of Permits and Test Results. – Each local health department shall maintain a registry of all private drinking water wells for which a construction permit or repair permit is issued. The registry shall specify the physical location of each private drinking water well and shall include the results of all tests of water from each well. The local health department shall retain a record of the results of all tests of water from a private drinking water well until the well is properly closed in accordance with the requirements of this Article and rules adopted pursuant to this Article.

(l) Authority Not Limited. – This section shall not be construed to limit any authority of local boards of health, local health departments, the Department of Health and Human Services, or the Commission for Health Services to protect public health. (2006-202, s. 4; 2006-259, ss. 50(b), 50(c), 51.)

§ 87-98. Emergency Drinking Water Fund.

(a) The Emergency Drinking Water Fund is established within the Department.

(b) The Fund may be used to pay for notification, to the extent practicable, of persons aged 18 and older who reside in any dwelling unit, and the senior official in charge of any business, at which drinking water is supplied from a private drinking water well that is located within 1,500 feet of, and at risk from, known groundwater contamination. The senior official in charge of the business shall take reasonable measures to notify all employees of the business of the groundwater contamination, including posting a notice of the contamination in a form and at a location that is readily accessible to the employees of the business. The funds may also be used to cover the costs of testing private drinking water wells for contamination and for the provision of alternative drinking water supplies to persons whose drinking water well is contaminated.

(c) The Department shall disburse monies from the Fund based on financial need and on the risk to public health posed by groundwater contamination and shall give priority to the provision of services under this section to instances when an alternative source of funds is not available. The funds shall not be used for remediation of groundwater contamination. Nothing in this section expands, contracts, or modifies the obligation of responsible parties under Article 9 or 10 of Chapter 130A of the General Statutes, this Article, or Article 21A of this Chapter to assess contamination, identify receptors, or remediate groundwater or soil contamination.

(d) The Department shall establish criteria by which the Department is to evaluate applications and disburse funds from this Fund and may adopt any rules necessary to implement this section. (2006-255, s. 5.2.)